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WELLS RIVER BRIDGE.

1803-1903

Wells River Bridge

and

Other Haverhill Toll Bridges.

BY
WILLIAM F. WHITCHER.

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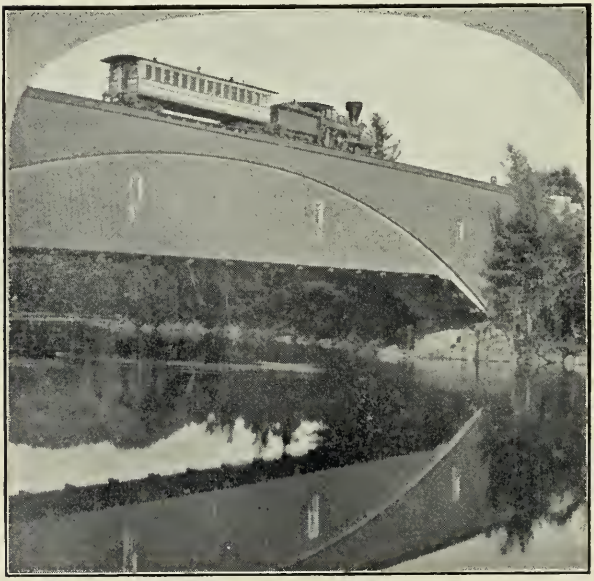
Bridge in 1867. Locomotives "McDuffie" and "Peter Clark."



Bridge in 1869. Old Style Locomotive and Car.

The Wells River Bridge.

By act of the New Hampshire legislature of 1903, the Concord & Montreal railroad was authorized to acquire the stock of the Wells River Bridge, and to fix the rate of tolls. The shares of stock which had not already been acquired by that corporation soon came into its possession, so that except in name, and as a matter of form to preserve the franchises conveyed by the charter granted to the Bridge proprietors in 1803, the Wells River Bridge may be said said to have passed out of existence after a hundred years of interesting history. Some of the more important facts of this history have recently been published by Mr. F. P. Wells in a letter to the St. Johnsbury Caledonian. Mr. Wells says:

"Er Chamberlin was, about 1770, the first settler in what is now the village of Wells River, and his first dwelling was on the river bank where the stream, which bears the same name as the village, joins the Connecticut. On or near the site of his cabin was erected in 1704 a rude block house, the first structure built by white men in this part of the country of which we have any knowledge. A few years later he began to keep a ferry to what is now Woodsville, which was kept by himself and his sons until the building of the first bridge in 1805. This bridge, the first of five across the Connecticut at this place, was a few rods below the present one. It was an open structure, and was built partly upon wooden "horses," as the supports underneath were called. In the spring freshet of 1807 it was carried away, and a new one built in the same year.

This second bridge stood but five years and was washed away in 1812. The proprietors of the bridge seem to have become discouraged by these successive disasters, and it was not till 1820 that a third bridge was constructed. This was also an open bridge, and was below the mouth of Wells river. It was carried away in the freshet of 1850, and a new one built, which stood till the present bridge was constructed, when it was taken down. It was demolished as a consequence of the "railroad war," a great event in its time, but which is pretty much forgotten now.

"When the old Boston, Concord and Montreal railroad was conceived, it was the intention of its projectors to follow up the Pemigewasset and Baker's river valleys, through the Oliverian notch, thence down the bank of that stream to its junction with the Connecticut, crossing the latter at South Newbury and proceeding up the valley of Hall's brook to South Ryegate, and thence to Montpelier. The Vermont portion of the road was to be built under a charter from the legislature authorizing the construction of a railroad from Montpelier to some point on the Connecticut river in the town of Newbury. But when the surveying party from Concord reached what is now Pike Station, in Haverhill, they came to a standstill, for the descent of the Oliverian valley was so rapid and the fall of the stream north of Haverhill Corner so great, as to make it impossible to descend to the level of the Connecticut there.

"After much deliberation and examination of the country, the directors decided to strike to the north, to the mouth of the Ammonoosuc, and form a junction there with the White Mountain Railroad, which was being constructed to Littleton, also crossing the Connecticut, making a junction with the Connecticut and Passumpsic Rivers Railroad at Wells River. But this new move was strongly resisted by the

latter corporation, which intended to erect a bridge there for its own use and form a junction with the White Mountain road, thus getting possession of the White Mountain travel then beginning to be considerable. As a part of their program they laid out the spur track from the present passenger depot at Wells River to the site of the proposed bridge over the Connecticut, intending to prevent the B. C. & M. from getting into Vermont. But they were not able to secure a charter from the New Hampshire legislature, enabling them to build a bridge there, yet were able to prevent the New Hampshire road from securing a charter from the Vermont legislature, allowing it to build a short piece of track on the Vermont side to connect with the Passumpsic road. Thus the two parties were at a deadlock.

"The late Hon. Charles B. Leslie of Wells River was then the attorney for the B. C. & M., people, and he advised the purchase of land along the river there, on the Vermont side, and the erection of an abutment upon that land. When this was done the Passumpsic people took another course, and endeavored by means of an injunction to prevent the building of an abutment on the Vermont side. Failing in this they tried to confiscate the land to the state on the ground that the B. C. & M. R. R., being a foreign corporation could not hold land in this state. But the courts decided that it could.

"By Mr. Leslie's advice the New Hampshire road made a trade with the Wells River toll bridge corporation, whose charter gave them the exclusive right to build a bridge within certain limits, to erect a new structure, which should take public travel through the bridge, while the railroad track was laid along the roof. When the "dump" at the west end of the bridge was constructed there came near being a riot. The Passumpsic people were determined to

prevent the other road from extending its track to their line, and while the B. C. & M., people employed a small army of men in filling in the dump the other road had as large a force engaged in wheeling the dirt away. This state of things went on for nearly a week. Many of the men on both sides were Irishmen, and in fighting mood, and the affair drew rough characters from all the country around. The people at Wells River were thoroughly frightened and expected nothing less than bloodshed and murder, not without reason.

"A few years before, when the cut at Ingalls Hill, two miles below Wells River was made, a riot broke out between two gangs of Irishmen which culminated in the murder of Michael Kelley, one of the foremen. Justly dreading a repetition of those scenes there was great alarm at Wells River, and it was determined to put an end to the tumult by the power of the law. But before a step could be taken in the direction of law and order it was discovered that no man within ten miles had authority to read the riot act.

"The commissions of justices of the peace expired by law on the first of December in each year, and it chanced that none of those who had been elected to that office in the town of Newbury had taken out commissions, so there was, legally, no justice of the peace in that town. The first constable, whose term of office did not expire till the first of the following April, was the only man in town who could order the dispersion of an unlawfnl assembly.

That official, in the first week in December, 1852, was Andrew Renfrew, an upright and fearless man, who lived in the southwest part of Newbury, eleven miles, at least, from the scene of disorder, and to him a messenger was sent who called him out of bed at midnight to go to the relief of the distressed people of Wells River. Arriving there he found a throng of angry men many of whom were fighting

drunk, and whiskey was very much in evidence. One of the parties had captured Elijah Clough, now an old man on the Bradford town farm, who was one of the ringleaders of the other party, and his friends were trying to rescue him. Clubs and other weapons were freely used; the mob was every moment becoming more excited and angry and Mr. Renfrew lost no time in proclaining the majesty of the law. A few arrests were made and the mob gradually dispersed. The dump was completed and in due time the track was laid and the old toll bridge taken down.

"The timber for Woodsville bridge was sawed in a mill that stood where Brown's lumber mills are now in Whitefield and floated down the river. It is of a type known as the "Burr truss," and there is a picture of this bridge in Scribner's Magazine for June, 1888.

"When it was built, and for many years after, engines and cars were constructed much lighter than they are now—a locomotive weighing thirty tons was considered a monster—and railway traffic over it was correspondingly light, but of later years the increasing weight of railway stock has compelled the repeated strengthening of the structure till the roadway has become narrow, dark and dangerous."

NOTES.

The first movement in the direction of securing a bridge across the Connecticut between the towns of Haverhill, and Newbury, Vt., resulted in the granting by the New Hampshire legislature, Jan. 4, 1795, of a charter, to Col. Asa Porter of Haverhill, and others, under the title of "Proprietors of Haverhill Bridge." This provided for the erection of a toll bridge near the boundary line between Haverhill and Bath, a little to the north of the present bridge. This bridge was to have a middle pier which was to be built on the small island north of the present bridge, and this island was ceded by the legislature to the proprietors of the bridge. Although four years, subsequently extended to seven, were allowed for the completion of the bridge, no bridge was erected and the charter expired in January

1802. For the thirty years or more previous to the granting of this charter, public travel between Haverhill and Newbury had been by ferry, the first chartered by the legislature of New Hampshire being in 1772 to Richard Chamberlin. Subsequently charters for ferries in other localities were granted to Col. Asa Porter and Er Chamberlin, the latter at Wells River.

The original charter of the Wells River Bridge, granted to Er Chamberlain, Ezekiel Ladd, James Whitelaw, Moses Little, Amos Kimball, William Abbott and their associates, passed the New Hampshire House of Representatives Dec. 16, 1803, the Senate Dec. 23, and was approved by Governor John Taylor Gilman, Dec. 27, 1803. The rates of toll established by this charter, indicate very clearly the modes of transportation, and the vehicles in use in this section a century ago. They were, "for each foot passenger one cent; for each horse and his rider or leader four cents; for each chaise or other carriage of pleasure with two wheels and one horse, ten cents; for each carriage of pleasure or with passengers with four wheels, twenty cents; for the like carriage with four horses, twenty-five cents; for each sleigh with one horse, four cents; for each sleigh with two horses, eight cents and two cents for each additional horse; for each cart or wagon or sled or other carriage of burden drawn by one beast four cents; for the like carriage drawn by two beasts, eight cents; if by more than two, four cents for each additional pair of horses or yoke of oxen; for sheep and swine, one quarter of one cent each; for cattle and horses, three quarters of one cent each, and to each team one person only shall be allowed to pass free of toll."

The proprietors met for organization, March 8, 1804. Sept. 4, the same year they voted to subdivide the six original shares into forty-eight shares, giving to each original proprietor, eight shares. Several meetings were held during the year, and Nov. 12, it was voted to raise one thousand dollars for the purpose of constructing a bridge, and that this amount be assessed upon the forty-eight shares. The cost of the first bridge, erected in 1805, was probably about one thousand dollars, since shortly after the completion of the bridge, twenty-one shares were sold at auction for the sum of $21.14 each, the holdings of Ezekiel Ladd and James Whitelaw, being purchased by Amos Kimball, and five of the shares of William Abbott being purchased by Nathaniel McKinstry.

Bridge in 1884. Air Line Train North.

After the loss of the first bridge by freshet in the spring of 1807, steps were taken at once to rebuild, and at a meeting held July 7, a tax of $12.50 was levied on each share for the purpose of rebuilding. This amount appears to have been insufficient, since at a meeting held Jan. 28, 1809, it was voted "to assess a tax of twenty-four dollars a share, on the several shares, including the $12.50 voted in July, 1807, to be paid by the 20th of February next." The cost of this second bridge appears to have been upwards of one thousand dollars, since at the meeting March 4, 1809, accounts to the amount of $1139 were allowed. The account of Amos Kimball amounted to $838.50, indicating that he must have furnished most of the material and built the bridge. Mr. Kimball was the grandfather of the late Ezra S. Kimball, and at one time owned a large farm, comprising what was afterwards known as the Evans, the King, the Ezra Kimball, and the Porter Kimball farms. When the second bridge was completed, he believed it to be freshet proof, and for a comparatively small sum, offered to insure the bridge against freshets for a term of years. The proprietors accepted his offer and the subsequent loss of the bridge was a personal one to him and caused him serious financial embarrassment.

This second bridge was repaired and strengthened in 1811, but was destroyed by a freshet in 1812. No action was taken towards building a new bridge till the spring of 1819. Acts were passed at the June sessions of the legislature in 1813, 1815, and 1817 extending the charter. April 20, 1819, Timothy Shedd, Charles Hale and David Worthen, were elected directors, and May 15, it was voted to rebuild the bridge, and an assessment of ten dollars a share was levied to be paid before June 1. A second assessment of fifteen dollars a share was levied Sept. 27, to be paid before the 1st of November.

On the 2d of November it was voted to build a toll house and move and repair the barn belonging to the Corporation; to contract for filling the trestle work of the bridge with stone; to authorize the directors "to let out the bridge by the job at their discretion; to procure all materials for finishing the bridge at their discretion; to purchase land for said corporation, and to dispose of the old toll house." At an adjourned meeting Dec. 28, it was voted to make a third assessment of twenty dollars a share, to be paid by February 1, 1820. At another adjourned meeting April 4, 1820, it was voted that Abraham Gale be employed to work as overseer in building the bridge and that he be allowed seven shillings six pence per day.

This vote would indicate that the bridge was not built by contract, but under the supervision of the directors, who were David Worthen, Charles Hale and Timothy Shedd. The original members of the corporation seem to have dropped out of the management. The bridge was not completed until the summer of 1820, since a meeting of the stockholders was called for August 7, for the purpose of raising money to complete the bridge. At this meeting an assessment of $20, a share was made, the entire four assessments amounting to $65 a share, or a total of $3120, which may be set down as approximately the cost of the bridge. This new bridge was constructed a little distance south of the two former bridges, which had been built on horses, or wooden piers which spanned the river just above the mouth of Wells River near where Er Chamberlin had maintained his ferry, previous to the building of the bridges, and where the ferry was re-established after the wash out of 1812. The toll house then erected, still stands in the meadow now owned by Ezra B. Mann, and has for the past fifty years been known as the Sawtell house. This bridge, unlike its two predcessors, was constructed with a roof. The system of annual passes or tickets, seems to have been inaugurated with the opening of this new bridge, since, Sept. 12, 1820, the directors were "authorized to agree with people to cross the bridge by the year."

In 1832 the question of repairing the bridge began to be agitated, and an article was placed in the warrant for the annual meeting in September, "to see whether the proprietors will vote to raise money to repair the bridge, and by what method." This article was however, dismissed. The article appeared again in 1833, but at the meeting Sept. 4, it was voted "that the directors be authorized to procure a sufficient quantity of stone to build two abutments, one on each end of the bridge, the present season," indicating that the abutments had previously been of wood. Another meeting was called for Oct. 26, 1833, to consider the question of repairs or rebuilding, when it was voted to rebuild the next season, 16 shares voting in the affirmative and 10 in the negative. This vote was, however, rescinded at an adjourned meeting held Dec. 3. The matter remained in abeyance till the annual meeting of 1835, held Sept. 3, when it was voted to rebuild the bridge the ensuing year, and at an adjourned meeting held Oct. 20, it was voted that the old bridge be taken for a model, subject to such alterations as the directors might order, and that the directors be the agents to make contracts, procure materials and superintend the building of the bridge. The

bridge was rebuilt in 1836, in accordance with this vote, for the most part from money in the treasury. It was built with stone abutments and two stone piers, and with a roof. That more money was needed than was in the hands of the treasurer, appears from the following vote passed at the annual meeting Sept. 4, 1837. "Voted that the directors be authorized to hire five hundred dollars if they can procure the same at six per cent., if not, to make an assessment upon the shares so as to raise said amount to defray the bills and expenses of rebuilding the bridge, and refund the same so soon as collected by tolls or otherwise." As there is no record of any assessment, it may be concluded that the loan authorized was made. This bridge as rebuilt stood, only minor repairs being made, till the main span was carried away by a freshet in the spring of 1850.

At a special meeting held May 22, 1850, the entire 48 shares being represented, it was, "Voted, that we rebuild the bridge over the Connecticut river at the place where the old one stood, the present season, as soon as may be, on the place of the old bridge," also, "voted that we raise forty dollars on each share in said bridge to be paid as follows: fifteen dollars on a share to be paid on the 10th day of June next,—fifteen dollars per share to be paid on the 10th day of July next, and ten dollars per share to be paid the 10th day of August next. The work must have been speedily accomplished, as, on the 19th of September at a meeting adjourned from the annual meeting of September 10, it was voted to allow the account of Charles Hale "agent to repair toll house and rebuild bridge." The proprietors present at this meeting were Timothy Shedd, A. B. W. Tenney, Charles Hale, Samuel Hutchins, Edward Hale, John C. Morse, William R. Shedd, Cyrus J. S. Scott and Oscar C. Hale. Other proprietors at this time who were not present either in person or by proxy were Abigail Little, Abiathar G. Britton and Mary P. Hancock. The large majority of the shares were owned at this time in Vermont.

While this bridge rebuilt in the summer of 1850 paid excellent dividends to the share holders, being no less than $26 per share for the first year, it must have been unsatisfactory, since the subject of a new free bridge was being agitated in 1851. In November of that year a special meeting was called "to hear and act upon a proposition to purchase the right to erect a free bridge within the chartered limits of the corporation," and "to sell or agree upon the terms of sale of all or any part of the rights and franchise of the corporation." At this meeting November 20, 1851, "chose Cols. O. C. Hale and A. B. W. Tenney, a committee to negotiate with individ-

uals or corporations in relation to the sale of the Wells River Bridge and the corporate rights of the proprietors." The outcome of these negotiations was the contract with the Boston, Concord & Montreal Railroad, by which a new bridge was constrncted by the railroad corporation for the Wells River bridge proprietors, the new bridge to be used both for highway and railroad purposes. In the warning for the annual meeting held September 14, 1852, were the three following articles: "1st, to see if the proprietors will build a new bridge in another place, and in what way they will pay for the same. 2d, to see if the proprietors will issue new stock in addition to the present number of shares to pay for a new bridge. or for building the same, or for the right of crossing another bridge. 3d, to do, or transact any other business in relation to a new bridge, or a change of location, or in carrying out the object of the foregoing articles."

The situation was this: The Boston, Concord and Montreal railroad was completing its tracks to Woodsville, and wished to cross the Connecticut river to form a junction with the Passumpsic railroad. The latter corporation did not wish this junction, and was doing all in its power to prevent it. The bridge company owned certain franchises which would be of service to the Boston, Concord & Montreal in accomplishing its purpose of crossing the river. The existing toll bridge was of an unsatisfactory character, having to be weighted with stone to resist the pressure of high water. A new bridge was needed. A free bridge was desirable, but there seemed, as there also seemed fifty years later, to be no way of securing it. A contract was therefore signed September 1, 1852, by A. B. W. Tenney and Oscar C. Hale as a committee of the Wells River Bridge and Ira Goodall and Charles Lane as a committee on the part of the Boston, Concord and Montreal Railroad which solved the problem. It gave the bridge proprietors a new bridge without any expenditure on their part, and gave the railroad what it most earnestly desired, a right of way into Vermont, enabling it to form a Junction with the Passumpsic at Wells River. The credit of devising this plan, belongs to the late Charles B. Leslie of Wells River, who was for many years one of the attorneys of the Boston, Concord & Montreal railroad. The railroad on its part agreed "to construct for the proprietors of the Wells River Bridge,a bridge across Connecticut river opposite Wells River village with all necessary highways and approaches to the same for the accommodation of public travel, and be for the sole use and occupancy of said proprietors of Wells River bridge for the purposes of a toll bridge; the said bridge is to be so constructed that if the said railroad shall hereafter wish to run their cars and engines over the same, they may do so by

constructing a track for that purpose, on the top or upper chords of said bridge, while the lower chords and approaches to the bridge are to remain unincumbered by such construction and running of the cars. And the said Boston, Concord & Montreal railroad does hereby convey to said proprietors of Wells River Bridge the sole use and occupancy and control of the track or roadway over chords of said bridge together with the highways and approaches to the same also the use of land near the easterly end of said bridge convenient and necessary for a toll house and garden spot for the same * * * * *, and said Boston, Concord & Montreal railroad further agrees to maintain and keep in repair the said bridge free of charge forever, except the flooring of the bridgeway which is to be kept by said proprietors of Wells River Bridge. And the proprietors of Wells River Bridge agree to accept the said bridge when constructed, together with its highways and approaches, and use the same on their toll bridge, and in payment therefor to issue to the Boston, Concord & Montreal or to some person as trustee, for their use, fifteen shares of capital stock of their corporation to be on a par per share with the present existing forty-eight shares of said corporation." This agreement was ratified by the proprietors of the Wells River Bridge at their meeting Sept. 14, 1852, and it was further voted to issue the fifteen shares to the railroad when the bridge should be open and ready for use. The directors were also authorized to build a new toll house and also to sell the old toll house, land, bridge and materials in the exercise of their discretion, and pay over the avails to the Treasurer. The toll house was sold to Julia Ann Sawtell, and the old bridge to the railroad company in April 1853 for the sum of $175.

The work of constructing the new bridge was pushed as rapidly as pos ible, but haste did not preclude the use of the best of material as is evidenced from the fact that the bridge stood the test of constant and arduous service for upwards of fifty years, and when taken down the present month, December, 1903, the frame was still sound showing no signs of decay except on the ends of the arches. It was what is known as "the Burr truss" bridge and at the time of its construction, was the only one of the kind and was also the longest single span in the United States. The frame of the bridge was of selected old growth white pine, cut in the town of Whitefield, and sawed in a mill situated on the site so long occupied by the mills of the Brown Lumber Co. There is a tradition, which is accepted by Mr. Wells, that the lumber for the bridge was floated down the river in Whitefield to the Connecticut, and thence down the Connect-

icut to near the old bridge, where it was taken out and hauled to the plain west of the present passenger station, where it was framed and speedily placed in position. Mr. Warren J. Fisher of North Haverhill, who was foreman of the gang who built the stone abutments, says, however, that the lumber was all hauled from Whitefield by six horse teams. So rapid was the progress of the work of construction that tolls were collected at the new bridge as early as December 4, 1852, less than three months after the contract for its construction was made, though the work of construction was not completed. On the 2d of March 1853, the accounts of the old bridge were closed, and the 15 shares of new stock being issued to the Boston, Concord & Montreal railroad, the accounts of the new bridge were opened. The final dividend paid to the old share holders was $2.80 a share. The total amount of dividends paid after the assessment of $40 a share was made in May, 1850, for the purpose of rebuilding the bridge, until the old bridge was abandoned and the new bridge opened to travel March 2, 1853, was $60.80 a share. The $40 assessment had not been unprofitable. Indeed the bridge had been a good dividend payer from the start, and continued to be a profitable investment for its owners for a number of years after the bridge of 1852-3 was built. Substantial divdends were paid until after the railroad had obtained a controlling interest in the stock, when through carelessness in collecting tolls and the issuance of passes at nominal rates, there was a shrinkage in income, while through growth of population on both sides the river, and the increase in business, the bridge was being used more and more each year. In the year 1853-54 the income from tolls was $415.00, from annual passess $222.37, a total of $637.37; 1863-64, tolls $373, passes 184.75, total $557.75; 1873-74, tolls $262, passes $241.75, total 503.75; 1883.84, tolls $163.87, passes $271.25, total $435.12; 1893-94, tolls $132.22, passes 388, total $520.22. It is easy to see that the receipts in later years have been out of all proportion to the use of the bridge, and that it has lacked but little of being a free bridge.

The contract for building the bridge was taken by Warren H. Smith, who was also the contractor for constructing the railroad from Warren to Woodsville, and the construction was under the supervision of Cyrus Latham, resident engineer of the railroad, and of his father, Deacon Latham, who was on the ground during the entire time of construction. Martin Powers of Bath was the boss carpenter, and Warren J. Fisher had charge of the stone work. The workmen boarded in Wells River, as there were but two or three houses in what is now Woodsville.

The cost of the bridge and of the approaches including several rods of highway on the Vermont side, built to connect with what was the old ferry highway near the present railroad bridge across Wells River was about $20,000. This was paid by the railroad according to the contract. The cost of the toll house, which was met by the bridge proprietors, was a little upwards of $1000.

There were as Mr. Wells has said, some exciting incidents in the latter part of November and the first part of December, 1852, when the effort was made to prevent the Boston, Concord & Montreal from building a track to connect with the Passumpsic. In an old diary kept by the resident engineer, are these entries: "Tuesday Nov. 30, 1852. This afternoon about 75 men from the Passumpsic road took possession of our work on the west side of the bridge, but about 1 o'clock at night, our men having collected, drove them all off, leaving very much frightened." "Wednesday Dec. 1, 1852. At night some 200 or 300 of our men collected expecting the enemy at Wells River bridge, but they did not show themselves."

The bridge was strengthened and thoroughly repaired in 1868, and was again strengthened by new arches in 1876, these latter, however, making the roadway of the toll bridge too narrow for safety. The need of a new bridge has been felt for some years and it is greatly to be regretted that with the destruction of the old bridge, a highway bridge has not been erected separate from the railroad bridge, either free at the outset, or with a prospect that it might be made a free bridge in the immediate future. The railroad corporation as the owner of the shares of the Wells River bridge made liberal offers looking to this end, but they were not accepted, and attempts made to secure state aid in building a free bridge at the session of the legislature of 1901 also failed. The new bridge now being erected will doubtless remain a toll bridge until by joint action of the states of New Hampshire and Vermont all the bridges on Connecticut river are made free."

The committee to build the first bridge chosen at a meeting held Oct. 15, 1804, were Capt. Amos Kimball, Moses Little and Er Chamberlin. John Kimball was clerk of the corporation until 1821. John Kimball was a son of Capt. Amos, father of the late Dudley P. Kimball, and grandfather of the late J. Porter Kimball. Capt. Amos Kimball had the charge of building the two first bridges, and the management of these was largely in the hands

of the Kimball family until the building of the bridge of 1820, when the majority of the proprietors seem to have changed from New Hampshire to Vermont. The names of the directors indicate very clearly the ownership of the bridge in its century of history: 1805, Amos Kimball, Er Chamberlin, Dr. Nathaniel McKinstry; 1806, same board; 1807, same board; 1808, Amos Kimball, Jacob Bailey, Er Chamberlin, Moses Campbell, Jr., Joshua Hale; 1809, Amos Kimball, Er Chamberlin, Jacob Bailey; 1810, Er Chamberlin, John Kimball, Jacob Bailey; 1811, Amos Kimball, Jacob Bailey, Moses Gage. There is no record of a meeting again till 1819 when the directors chosen were, Timothy Shedd, David Worthen, Charles Hale; 1821, John C. Morse, clerk; directors, Timothy Shedd, George Little, Ira White; 1822, same; 1823, Timothy Shedd, Thomas Hancock, Ira White; 1824, Timothy Shedd, Ira White, John C. Morse. In 1825 Thomas Hancock was chosen clerk, and he held this office until his death in August 1858, when W. R. Shedd was appointed in his place. The directors were: 1826, Samuel Hutchins, Jr., John C. Morse, Ira White; 1827, Ira White, Samuel Hutchins, Jr., A. B. W. Tenney; 1828, Ira White, Ezra Gates, Charles Hale; 1829, the same; 1830, the same; 1831, Charles Hale, John Kimball, Ezra Gates; 1832, the same; 1833, Charles Hale, John Kimball, Timothy Shedd; 1834, Timothy Shedd, Charles Hale, A. B. W. Tenney; 1835, Timothy Shedd, Charles Hale, John C. Morse; 1836, Timothy Shedd, Charles Hale, A. B. W. Tenney; 1837, Timothy Shedd, Charles Hale, John C. Morse; 1838, Timothy Shedd, Charles Hale, A. B. W. Tenney; 1839, Timothy Shedd, Charles Hale, Ira White; 1840, the same; 1841, Timothy Shedd, Charles Hale, John C. Morse; 1842, the same; 1843, Timothy Shedd, Charles Hale, A. B. W. Tenney; 1844, Timothy Shedd, Charles Hale, John C. Morse; 1845, Timothy Shedd, A. B. W. Tenney; 1846, Timothy Shedd, John C. Morse, Charles Hale; 1847, the same; 1848, the same; 1849, the same; 1850, John C. Morse, W. R. Shedd, A. B. W. Tenney; 1851, Charles Hale, W. R. Shedd, John C. Morse; 1852, Charles Hale, A. B. W. Tenney, W. R. Shedd. At the annual meeting of 1853, 35 shares were represented, the 15 belonging to the railroad being represented by proxy, but in the choice of directors and treasurer, the same policy was pursued as before the issue of the new shares. The majority of the stock was owned by Wells River citizens, and the management of the bridge remained in their hands until the annual meeting of 1868. The names appearing on the director roll in these years were Charles Hale, A. B. W. Tenney, W. R. Shedd, Edward Hale, John N. Morse who was elected in 1865, and William B. Abbott who was elected in 1864.

O. C. Hale was treasurer in 1850, and continued in office until 1857 when he was succeeded by W. R. Shedd who was, in turn, succeeded in 1865 by W. B. Abbott. All these officials were citizens of Wells River except John N. Morse of Haverhill. The railroad's holdings of shares were unrepresented during these years, except at the meetings of 1853 and '54. At the meeting of 1868, 34 shares were represented, of which 15 belonged to the railroad, 7 to Charles Lane, clerk of the railroad corporation, and 6 to Charles M. Weeks of Woodsville. Henry W. Ramsey station agent at Woodsville was chosen clerk, Charles M. Weeks treasurer, and Charles Lane, Charles M. Weeks and John N. Morse directors. From this time on, Wells River had no share in the management of the bridge, which, as the railroad acquired the shares, soon came under railroad control. Mr. Weeks remained in the directorate until the annual meeting of 1877, when his place was taken by Joseph A. Dodge of Plymouth, superintendent of the railroad. Mr. Morse remained a director until the annual meeting of 1891, when his place was filled by the election of Edward F. Mann. Other members of the directorate until 1896, since which time all officers have been officials or employees of the railroad, were John E. Lyon, J. Thomas Vose, W. A. Stowell, Charles S. Mellen, S. S. Kimball, John F. Webster, Philip J. Baird. C. M. Weeks served as treasurer 1868-77, H. W. Ramsey 1877-79, Ezra B. Mann 1879-1889, F. W. Baird 1889-95, J. C. Gallagher 1895-1903. Members of the directorate since 1896 have been: Geo. E. Cummings, F. W. Baird and John F. Webster.

In 1902 all the shares of stock had been acquired by the Concord & Montreal railroad and the legislature of 1903 legalized this acquisition by empowering the railroad to hold these shares and fix the rate of tolls. The changes which have taken place in the control of the bridge have been such as were inevitable from its connection with the growth and development of Woodsville, while Wells River has remained at a comparative standstill.

By the kind permission of Mr. Frederick P. Wells of Newbury, Vt., whose invaluable history of the town of Newbury was published some two years since, the following account of the other toll bridges between Haverhill and Newbury is taken from his most interesting chapter on "Connecticut River:"

"The journal of the New Hampshire House of Representatives for

the session of 1794, states that among the business brought before the house on December 30, was the following: "Whereas, Benjamin Chamberlin of Newbury, Vermont, proposes building a Bridge over Connecticut river, at, or near the place where he and his father have kept a ferry ever since the settlement of the town, which is the best and oldest road for passing between the states to the north and Canada, prays to be allowed to build and tend such bridge for toll." The principal subscribers to the enterprise, on the Haverhill side, were: Moses Dow, $400; Ezekiel Ladd and John Montgomery, each $100; and on the Newbury side: Thomas Johnson, $300; Benjamin and Nathaniel Chamberlin, and Josiah Little, each $100. The Haverhill subscriptions amounted to $1000, and it was stated that as much had been promised from Newbury, but owing to the high water and floating ice prevailing at the time, the man with the Newbury subscription was unable to cross the river. On the 7th of January, 1795, the same day on which Colonel Porter presented his petition for a bridge at Wells River, a petition similar to that offered by Chamberlin, was presented in behalf of Simeon Goodwin and Robert Johnston.

"Ebenezer Brewster of Hanover, Peter Carleton of Landaff, and Capt. John Mann of Orford, were appointed a committee to view the river from the lower end of Howard's island to the south line of Haverhill, and select a site for a bridge. This committee reported at the June session of 1795, in favor of locating the bridge about thirty rods below Chamberlin's ferry. The charter was granted June 18, 1795, to Benjamin Chamberlin, Ezekiel Ladd, Moses Dow, Thomas Johnson, William Wallace, John Montgomery, and associates as "Proprietors of Haverhill Bridge." Their charter rights extend "from the extreme point of the little Ox-bow, to the southwest corner of Ezekiel Ladd's farm, a little above the mouth of the Oliverian." The rates of toll were nearly like those of the Wells River bridge. A bridge was built there in 1796, and stood for some time. It was, probably, an open bridge. Among the Johnson papers there is a copy, in his own handwriting of a letter from Colonel Johnson to General Chase, which casts some light upon the construction of that bridge and its fate.

NEWBURY, April 19, 1798.

SIR:

You have no doubt heard of our misfortune as to losing our Bridge, it was owing to two things: 1st the ambition of some of the proprietors wanting to have the longest arch yet built; 2d the workman was not equal to so great a piece of business. One abutment stands good, also the little Bridges with very little repairing are good, our Plank

with a considerable part of the timber on hand. The main thing we want is a workman that understands building a Peer in the middle of the river, we have no man in this part of the Country that ever helped build one, or knows anything about it. As you went through the business for us last year, I ask as a particular favor in behalf of the Proprietors, that you would recommend to us a suitable man to undertake to build a Peer. * * Our stone are all within ten rods of the river bank, and our timber within 3-4 of a mile. Our Peer will want to be twenty-five feet high. In this case I wish you would make a brief guess what the cost would be to build such a peer.

Yours, etc.,

THOS. JOHNSON."

"That some kind of a bridge was reconstructed it seems certain from the recorded action of the selectmen in 1798, who placed the south of highway District No. 2, which "runs down on the river as far as the north abutment of the bridge across Connecticut river." This bridge is mentioned elsewhere. But it did not stand many years, evidently, as the records of the present bridge corporation, beginning January 1, 1805, state that on that day a meeting of the Haverhill Bridge Company was held, at which Charles Johnston, Samuel Ladd, Joseph Pearson, John Montgomery, Jeremiah Harris and Asa Tenney were appointed a committee to make estimates for building a bridge similar to the "Federal Bridge" over the Merrimack river at Concord, and to determine the best place to build said bridge. This committee reported, May 4, 1805, that the bridge be built "from land of Mr. Phineas Ayer in Haverhill, to that of Col. Robert Johnston in Newbury," i. e., where the present bridge is. Some time between that date and 1809, a bridge was built. The records are meagre, and nothing is said about this bridge being carried off, but on April 3, 1822, Ephraim Kingsbury, the clerk, sold all the shares in the corporation to Asa Tenney and Josiah Little for one cent a share. It would seem there was nothing left of the bridge.

"There is no further record till August 18, 1833, when Josiah Little petitioned for a meeting to be called on September 10, at which stock for a new bridge was subscribed.

"In the Democratic Republican for September 19, 1833, Ephraim Kingsbury, clerk, advertises for proposals for building the present bridge, and for furnishing stone, and erecting the abutments and a pier, which was built in 1834. No record of the cost is preserved, but it is understood to have been about $9,200. It is believed to be the oldest bridge on Connecticut river, yet it is still called the "new bridge" by old people. The thoroughness of its construction is attested by its having withstood all the freshets of nearly seventy

years, although the water has, several times, been three feet deep along its driveways, and great quantities of logs crowded against it from above. It has a double passage-way for teams and is believed to be the only bridge of that manner of construction on the river. Repairs have been made upon it from time to time, and in 1895, about $2,000 was expended upon it. The structure was strengthened by means of arches, a feature not known, or not employed in this part of the country, at the time it was built.

"On April 1, 1898, it was voted to call in all the old stock, and issue new, which consist, of ninety-two shares of one hundred dollars each. It is all owned by eleven persons. The present directors are: W. H. Atkinson, H. E. and R. W. Chamberlain. Arthur K. Merrill is clerk and treasurer.

"The charter for the bridge between South Newbury and Haverhill was granted, June 16, 1802, to Moody Bedell and others, to be built within the limits of Bedell's ferry. The first meeting of the stockholders was held May 9, 1805, at the inn of Asa Boynton in Haverhill. There were one hundred shares of stock, Moody Bedell holding thirty-five. Twenty-three shares were held on the Vermont side, Capt. William Trotter of Bradford, holding fifteen. Moody Bedell conveyed for $900, his rights in the ferry, to the bridge company. The first directors were William Trotter, Moody Bedell, Asa Boynton, and Gideon Tewksbury. On the 24th of June they contracted with Avery Sanders to build a bridge for $2,700. This was an open bridge, resting on wooden piers. General Moody Bedell, for whom that bridge and its successors were named, was a son of Col. Timothy Bedell, who visited Coos with Bayley, Hazen, and Kent, in 1760, and was himself a revolutionary soldier, and a distinguished officer in the war of 1812. He died in 1841. How long this bridge stood is not precisely known. President Dwight speaks of crossing it in 1812. In that year the shares held by General Bedell were sold to Hon. Moses P. Payson of Bath. In 1821, September 4, a meeting was held to see about rebuilding the bridge, by which it seems that it had been wholly or partly carried away. It appears that much of the timber and plank were saved. On June 16, 1824, the report of the committee which rebuilt the bridge was presented, which showed that the cost had been $2,585.61 inclusive of what was paid the committee for their services. It would appear that this bridge stood till 1841, as on February 11th the directors were instructed to use every effort to secure the bridge. But, three days later, the stockholders voted "not to rebuild," by which vote it seems that the bridge had been carried away in the meantime.

New Steel Bridge, Opened February 1, 1904.

"There was no bridge from that time till 1851, when an open bridge, supported by wooden piers, and with heavy timbers crossing the driveway overhead, was built. Col. Moody Chamberlain, J. R. Reding and Asa Low were the building committee. This was carried away by the high water of the spring of 1862. In the fall of that year the middle pier of the bridge was constructed, and the next year a covered bridge was built. C. G. Smith, Johnson Chamberlain and Nathaniel Bailey were the building committee. This bridge was of very light construction, and in 1865, the directors were instructed to strengthen it by putting in arches. This structure was very narrow, and was demolished by a gale, July 5, 1866. The present bridge was built in that year.

"In 1812, a law was passed equalizing the tolls on the three bridges between Newbury and Haverhill, as follows: Each foot passenger, one cent; each person, except the driver, on any team, one cent; each one-horse team six and one-fourth cents; each chaise or other carriage, twelve and one-half cents; each team drawn by three horses, fifteen cents; four-wheeled carriage drawn by two horses, twenty-five cents. and three cents for each additional horse.

"In 1809, a charter was granted to Asa Tenney, Thomas, John, Moses and David Johnson, and William B. Bannister of Newbury, and eighteen others, resident elsewhere, for a bridge between Horse Meadow and the Ox-bow, at some place between one-half mile above and one-half mile below Colonel Porter's ferry. The proprietors were to build a road "from Colonel Porter's ferry house, to the main road in Haverhill." It is not known that any action was ever taken building about a bridge at that place."

The need of a new Wells River Bridge has long been recognized and plans for the one now approaching completion were made by J. P. Snow of Boston, bridge engineer of the Boston & Maine, a year ago, and proposals were invited for the construction of a bridge. The contract for the stone masonry was awarded to Ellis & Buzzel of Woburn, Mass., and that for the construction to the American Bridge Co. of New York.

The work upon the stone abutments was begun about the first of August, 1903, and was under the supervision of Patrick Brown as foreman. The old abutments were taken out, and the new made of large granite blocks laid in cement, on bed rock on the East side, and on the earth on the West. For these abutments some 4000 cubic yards of earth were excavated, some of which was used for back filling, and 1600 yards of stone were used. The river abutments were

cut down, so that the present bridge seat is about 8 feet lower than the old. Parapets about 14 feet high have been constructed of Portland cement and crushed rock, and upon these the stringers for the roadway of the toll bridge rest. About 100 barrels of Portland cement and 100 tons crushed rock have been used in their consruction. At each end of the main bridge, over the approaches to the toll bridge, are two short plate girder bridges, that at the east end being 48 feet in length and that on the west 52 feet. While these are constructed separate from the main bridge, they are riveted to it, so that the whole constitutes one bridge.

The main bridge is what may be described as a half hitch Baltimore pin truss, and is 239 feet and 2 inches in length from centre to centre of pins. The truss is about 33 feet high and contains 460 tons of thoroughly tested open hearth steel. The four large pins in the posts are 8 1-2 inches in diameter, and the other pins in the truss 6 3-4 in their diameter. The posts are 2 1-2 feet square and 37 feet in length. Besides the pins there are driven 6660 field rivets, being driven at white heat, four gangs of riveters being employed, each gang driving about 125 rivets a day. All the steel used in the construction of the bridge is guaranteed to stand a strain of from 54,000 to 62,000 lbs. to the square inch, and all the material is carefully inspected before being used.

The ties for the railroad track on the top of the bridge are covered with planking which constitutes the roof of the bridge. The roadway for the toll bridge is 15 feet between trusses, and the sidewalk on the south side of the bridge guarded by railing is five feet in width. The water in the river underneath the bridge is from 22 to 40 feet in depth and the railroad track is 45 feet above the water.

Work on the construction of the bridge was begun the last of October, and it is now thought that the bridge will be fully completed by the first of February. This bridge will be in every respect a credit to the designer, Mr. Snow, and to the contractors. It will be one of the finest on the Boston and Maine system, indeed one of the finest in New England. The construction of the bridge has been in charge of J. C. Griffith of Little Valley, N. Y., and F. M. Stearns of Hartford, Conn. John W. Storrs of the engineering department of the Boston & Maine railroad, who has his headquarters at Concord has had supervision of the construction and has inspected the steel and riveting. Woodsville and Wells River, and the adjoining towns will heartily welcome the completion of a structure which will furnish a more commodious avenue of communication between them the coming century, than has been furnished by the six historic

structures which have spanned the river under the name of Wells River bridge during the past hundred years.

The new bridge was opened to public travel the first week in February, 1904.

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